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U.S. IS CALLED HURT BY 2 SPY SUSPECTS

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WASHINGTON, May 28 — The United States was "badly hurt" by disclosures the Navy says were made by a father-son spy team, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence said today.

"It's a significant security breach," said the Senator, Patrick J. Leahy of Vermont, who said that intelligence officials briefed him about the case last week. Federal officials have asserted that this is one of the most grievous espionage cases in the Navy's history.

In Federal District Court in Baltimore today, prosecutors announced the indictment of the two men, John A. Walker, a retired Navy communications officer, and his son Michael, on charges of espionage. They are being held without bail. If convicted, they face a maximum sentence of life in prison.

A high-ranking Government official said that there was strong evidence the elder Mr. Walker was a Soviet spy while serving in sensitive military posts more than 15 years ago.

Investigators' Concern Grows

The official, who asked not to be identified, said that investigators had grown increasingly concerned that secret information disclosed to the Soviet Union in Mr. Walker's Navy career could still be of value, particularly data about the ability of American forces to track the Soviet submarine fleet.

He is suspected of supplying the Soviet Union with detailed information about the secret codes used to pass information to submarines, according to the Government official, who asked not to be named.

That information could have used to break the codes, the official said, permitting the Russians virtually unlimited access to confidential material about the ability of American forces to track the Soviet submarine fleet.

Military officials have denied that the plot had harmed national security in recent years, saying that the value of the elder Mr. Walker's information would have declined with time.

The elder Mr. Walker and his 22-year-old son, who was a yeoman third class aboard the aircraft carrier Nimitz, were accused of smuggling information from the Nimitz to a diplomat in the Soviet Embassy in Washington.

The six-count indictment named the

diplomat as Aleksei G. Tkachenko, who is listed in the State Department's February 1985 Diplomatic List as a third secretary. The indictment calls him a vice consul. The Soviet Embassy in Washington had no comment on the indictment, nor would it confirm reports from Administration sources that Mr. Tkachenko was recalled to Moscow last week.

A spokesman for the F.B.I. said that agents believe the elder Mr. Walker spied for money. Mr. Walker, a 47-year-old private detective from Norfolk, Va., is the focus of the investigation. He had top-secret security clearance until his retirement from the Navy in 1976.

Code-Breaking Information

The Government official said that code-breaking information might have been used by the Soviet Union to determine what types of camouflage devices were most effective against American surveillance.

Eugene J. Carroll, a retired admiral, said: "One of the things the Soviets know that we do well is locate submarines. But of course they don't know exactly how well we're doing. If they knew which of their subs we had found, they would know which of their subs we hadn't found."

The admiral, who now works as a spokesman for the Center for Defense Information, a research group that is often critical of the military, said such information, even if it was gathered 15 years ago, might still be of "extraordinary value to the Soviets today."

"If I were the Soviets and I knew how well the Americans could track me, I wouldn't change a thing in peacetime," he said. "I wouldn't reveal that I had any special knowledge or start evading detection."

In the meantime, he said, "I would get to work repairing the holes in my detection system and hold those repairs in reserve" until war.